

PROJECT WORK AS ONE OF THE STRATEGY OF LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH

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The origin of learner-centered approach can be traced back to 80s when the United States initiated its first educational reform. The first reform efforts were directed at reforming the educational standards, the content, the process, the role of teachers. By the beginning of 90s the first educational reform was found to be seriously flawed for having used the wrong framework for reform. To provide the needed framework, American Psychological Association and Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory jointly developed “The Learner-Centered Psychological Principles” in 1990 to 1993. These principles can be considered as universal principles applicable to all learners in different cultures.

Learner-centered approach places the student at the centre of the education. It begins with understanding the educational contexts from which a student comes. It continues with the instructor evaluating the student’s progress towards learning objectives. By helping the students acquire the basic skills to learn, it ultimately provides a basis for learning throughout life.

The new role of a teacher focuses on ways to facilitate the learning process:

- Fostering student’s learning
- Accommodating different styles
- Motivating students to accept responsibilities for learning
- Designing activities in which students interact with the material, the teacher and each other
- Encouraging, inspiring student ownership of learning

“Learner-centered teachers connect students and resources. They design activities and assignments that engage learners. They facilitate in individual and collective contexts” (5, p.76)

In student-centered classroom, at different time, students may be working alone, or in a group. Also they may be teacher-led. The ideal size for a student-centered class is 12. The larger class, the more necessary it is to have a student-centered class. The only way to give all the students time to speak is by having them work together.

There are different types of interactive activities that can be utilized in the learner-centered classroom. Some activities, like discussion and role play, are quite suitable as working together activities. Brainstorming can lead to a very lively discussion. In this article we would like to touch upon the project work as one of the best way to implement learner-centered approach. The project-based learning takes learner-centeredness to a higher level. The main advantage of this activity is that the students get control for what they are doing. The role of a teacher is to observe the students, to watch how they interact, how they carry out the research, how they organize and plan their projects.

A project is an extended piece of work on a particular topic where the content and the presentation are determined by learners. The teacher provides the topic, but the project writers decide what they write and how they present. Project usually integrates language skills through number of activities: planning, gathering of information through reading, listening, interviewing, discussion, problem solving, reporting, display.

Haines identifies four types of projects :

1. Information and research projects which include such kinds of work as reports, displays.

2. Survey projects which may also include displays, but more interviews, summaries, findings.

3. Production projects which presuppose the work with radio, television, video, wall newspapers.

4. Performance/Organizational projects which are connected with parties, plays, drama, concerts.

Project work gives a clear sense of achievement. It enables all students to produce a worthwhile product. This feature of project work makes it particularly well suited to the mixed ability class, because students can work at their own pace and level. The brighter students can show what they know, unconstrained by the syllabus, while at the same time the slower learners can achieve something that they can take pride in, perhaps compensating for their lower language level by using more photos and drawings.

Projects bring real life into the classroom. It brings facts to life. Project work allows “life itself” to form part of the classroom and provides hundreds of opportunities for learning. Apart from the fun elements, project work involves real life communicative situations (analyzing, deciding, editing, rejecting, organizing, delegating) and often involves multi-disciplinary skills which can be brought from other subjects. All in all, it promotes a higher level thinking skills than just learning vocabulary and structures.

References

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